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What Factors Are Related to Medical Students' and Doctors' Attitudes Towards Older Patients?

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How to cite:

Samra, Rajvinder; Cox, Tom; Gordon, Adam; Conroy, Simon; Lucassen, Mathijs and Griffiths, Amanda (2017). What Factors Are Related to Medical Students' and Doctors' Attitudes Towards Older Patients? In: 21st IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics, 23-27 Jul 2017, San Francisco, California.

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Version: Version of Record

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What factors are related to medical students' and doctors' attitudes towards older patients?

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Background

Questionnaire studies have sought to identify the possible determinants of medical students' and doctors' attitudes towards older patients by examining relationships with a variety of factors, such as demographic; educational/training; exposure to older people; personality/cognitive; and job/career variables. This review collates and synthesises these findings.

Methods

Design: Systematic literature review

Review question: Which variables show a relationship with doctors' and medical students' self-reported attitudes towards older patients?

Search terms: Boolean search in title or abstract:

[physicians, medical students + 26 synonyms] AND [older people + 17 synonyms] AND [attitudes + 18 synonyms].

Search strategy: An electronic search of 10 databases was performed (ABI/Inform, ASSIA, British Nursing Index, CINAHL, Informa Health, Medline, PsycINFO, Science Direct, Scopus, and Web of Science) through to 7 February 2017.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria: Studies were included if they: quantitatively measured and reported attitudes toward older patients in medical doctors or medical students; conducted correlational analyses or difference testing of scores on measure of attitudes towards older patients with any other variable; and published in English in a peer-reviewed journal.

Quality assessment and extraction: Quality appraised using the STROBE checklist (von Elm et al., 2007).

Results: Characteristics of studies

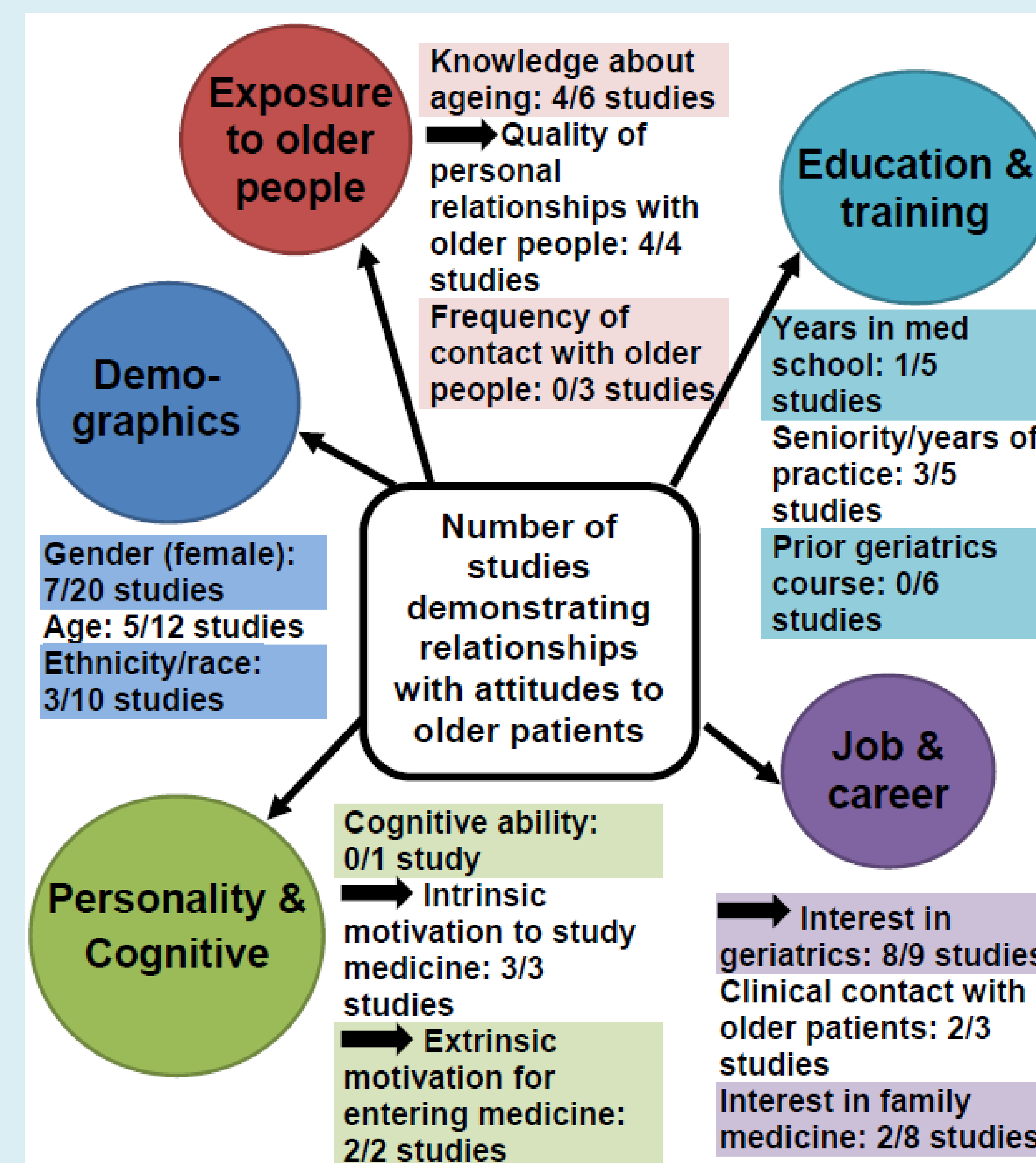
Searches identified 2422 articles; 37 studies met the overall eligibility criteria set.

Quality: rated low quality (n=14); medium quality (n=18); high quality (n=5).

Study setting: USA (n=25); UK (n=3); Singapore (n=3); Australia (n=2); Other (n=4).

Results: Relationships identified

With 14 low quality studies removed from the analysis, the figure below shows a selection of variables investigated for their relationship with attitudes.



Conclusions

Across high and medium quality studies, positive attitudes towards older patients were related to:

- **high quality personal relationships with older people,**
- **interest in pursuing geriatrics,**
- **intrinsic motivation** to enter medicine (such as the desire to help others).

Negative attitudes towards older patients were related to:

- **extrinsic motivation** to enter medicine (such as financial rewards).

Avenues for future research

- Early identification of medical students who may be interested in working with older patients using questionnaire research;
- Explore intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for entering medicine as a factor for specialising in older patient-dominated areas of medicine;
- Explore the nature of the link between good quality personal relationships (as opposed to frequency of contact) with older people and attitudes;
- Consider geriatrics interventions which focus on personal relationships with healthy older people to improve attitudes.

References & Acknowledgements

von Elm E, Altman D, Egger M, et al. The Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) statement: guidelines for reporting observational studies. *Lancet*. 2007;370(9596):1453-7.

This research was supported by an Economic and Social Research Council (United Kingdom) grant to the first author. Contact email: Rajvinder.samra@open.ac.uk